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# Castro 'assassination' con- fatal to Mafioso

By Ovid Demaris

AT A TIME WHEN Johnny Roselli, Chicago family coordinator in Las Vegas, should have been sitting on top of his world, disaster struck in the form of FBI agent Jack Barron.

For 45 years, Roselli had been living with a dangerous secret that was shared by only a handful of people.

Born in Esteria, Italy, Filippo Sacco was 6 years old in 1911 when his mother brought him to the United States to be reunited with his father, who had immigrated earlier and was living in East Boston. After the premature death of his father, his mother remarried, and it was his stepfather who introduced Filippo to a life of crime.

Strapped for money, the stepfather inducted Filippo to burn down the family home and then grabbed the insurance and ran. When the insurance company became suspicious, Filippo, who was in the seventh grade, left home, taking with him a picture of himself with his mother. He ended up with Al Capone in Chicago, where he learned all phases of the crime business and changed his name to John Roselli.

AFTER LEAVING HOME he cut all ties to his family. Through a trusted friend in Chicago, he arranged to have money sent home on a regular basis.

Then, one day, Barron, who had been dogging Roselli and Jimmy Fratianno for years, showed Roselli a copy of the picture he had taken with him so many years before; Roselli realized that one of the few people he had entrusted with his secret had betrayed him. Roselli was offered a choice of either cooperating or being deported back to Italy as an illegal alien.

For a man who valued his privacy, Roselli had decided on a daring move: Roselli had a close friend involved with Operation Mongoose, the code name for the CIA-Mafia assassination plot against

Fidel Castro. He asked two CIA men to intercede on his behalf with the FBI. In other words, get them off his back.

James P. "Big Jim" O'Connell of the CIA had Security Director Sheffield Edwards, also a member of Mongoose, inform the FBI that Roselli wanted to "keep square with the bureau" but was afraid that the mob might kill him for talking.

## The last Mafioso

Jimmy "The Weasel" Fratianno, an admitted mob killer who became boss of the Los Angeles Mafia, gives an inside view of organized crime in this series of excerpts from Ovid Demaris' new book, "The Last Mafioso." In part 4, Fratianno reveals that plans by two Mafia members to assassinate Fidel Castro were a sham.

that his request came at a time when J. Edgar Hoover, then FBI director, was not speaking to the CIA. Barron kept right on coming, forcing Roselli to make a desperate move.

ROSELLI SAID to Fratianno: "Jimmy, I'm going to tell you something you won't believe." He looked away, the muscles along his jaw tensing into rigid lines.

"This whole thing [the attempt to assassinate Castro] has been a scam. Santo [Trafficante] never did nothing but bull everybody. All those wild schemes the CIA dreamed up never got further than Santo. He just sat on it, conned everybody into thinking that guys were risking their lives sneaking into Cuba, having boats shot out from under them—all bull."

"Did Sam [Giancana, Chicago boss] get on Santo's back?" Fratianno asked.

"Jimmy, Sam can't do anything. Santo's a boss like him. . . . What a terrible waste of a lifetime opportunity. Imagine, Jimmy, if we'd knocked off Castro. Think of the power. . . ."

Roselli stopped, slapped the arm of his chair, and said: "What's the sense of talking about it."

CONSIDERING the importance of what Roselli had told Jimmy, his new plan was a bold and dangerous stroke. Although Robert Maheu and Joseph Shimon [who had been inducted into Mongoose] and the CIA officials involved knew all there was to know about the conception of the various assassination schemes, none knew anything about the actual execution of them beyond what Roselli had reported. Roselli hoped that by exercising his imagination and creating new and dramatic incidents, he could get the FBI off his back.

With Shimon at his side, Roselli visited the Washington, D.C., law office of

Edward P. Morgan, a former FBI executive. Roselli told Morgan of his eagerness to be of service to his country "because I owe it a lot."

He recounted the bizarre scenes first hatched up by the CIA's Technical Service Division to destroy Castro's image.

A BOX of Castro's favorite cigars were impregnated with a chemical that would produce a temporary disorientation. The hope was that he would smoke one before making a speech.

Then it was thallium salts, a powerful depilatory that it was hoped would make Castro's beard fall out if it were dusted on his shoes.

But once Roselli was inducted into the plot, the CIA decided it might be easier to kill Castro. The first scheme that occurred to them was a Capone-style ambush, with machineguns blazing. Roselli quickly nixed the idea, pointing out that, although once popular in Chicago, this method would present a recruitment problem in Cuba.

Instead Roselli suggested a slow-acting, painless poison that would allow the assassin time to escape.

Roselli told Morgan of his first meeting at the Fontainebleau Hotel in Miami with Big Jim O'Connell, where everybody used code names. Big Jim was Jim Olds, Roselli was John Rawlston, Giancana was Dan Gold, and Santo Trafficante, introduced as just plain Joe, was to be Gold's "courier" to Cuba and make arrangements there.

THERE HAD BEEN no end to the excuses offered by Trafficante that Roselli had passed on to Maheu and Big Jim: Castro had stopped patronizing a

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